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E7
RELEASED IN PART
B6

ACTION AID-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DOE-00	WHA-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	EUR-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	VCE-00
	AC-00	NSAE-00	TFBI-00	ACE-00	TEST-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/001W			

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O 281317Z NOV 03

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3963

SECSTATE WASHDC 3964

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY QUITO

NSC WASHDC

USCINCSO MIAMI FL

UNCLAS CARACAS 004079

NSC FOR TSHANNON

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, PREL, VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: OPPOSITION BEGINS SIGNATURE DRIVE
AGAINST CHAVEZ

SUMMARY:

1. (U) The following are early developments on the morning of November 28, 2003, the first day of the Venezuelan opposition's signature drive to petition for the recall of President Hugo Chavez (the so-called Reafirmazo). In most cases, long lines of people waited patiently as signature centers opened late. There were scattered reports of disruptions. End Summary.

Long Lines, Generally Calm, Scattered Harassment

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY: MELVIN E SINN

DATE/CASE ID: 24 JUN 2005 200404746

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY: APPEALS REVIEW PANEL

APPEAL ACTION: ORIGINAL DECISION UPHELD

REASON(S): B6

DATE/CASE ID: 11 OCT 2007 200404746

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2. (SBU) There were long lines early November 28 at numerous locations around the country for the beginning of the opposition's signature drive (the so-called Reafirmazo) to petition for the recall of President Hugo Chavez. The Embassy fielded six teams of unofficial observers in and around the capital, Maracaibo, Maracay and Valencia. Most signature collection centers did not open at 6:00 a.m. as planned and as of 7:30 a.m., people were still waiting for materials to arrive. Emboffs report hundreds of people in all the sites observed waiting calmly, and the opposition very pleased with the turnout.

3. (SBU) In the poorer Caracas section of La Candelaria, generally regarded as a Chavez stronghold, thousands of people, some braving rain, had gathered around the signing centers in a jubilant atmosphere to call for Chavez's ouster. At one location, organizers told Emboffs that several "thugs" riding motorcycles had come earlier and hurled fireworks into the crowd. Metropolitan police and 15 Venezuelan military have since arrived to watch over the crowd. Several people paraded around showing their fingers blackened by the ink to give a print on the petition, chanting "I signed" and "he's going."

4. (SBU) In the working class Caracas neighborhood of Los Teques, hundreds of signers waited patiently for some centers to open, sitting on lawn chairs or standing in lines along the street at several signing locations. In Maracaibo, some organizers reported that army personnel on hand were argumentative and uncooperative, preventing them from opening signature centers because GoV party representatives had not arrived. As of noon, one center in central Caracas had not opened, according to news reports. The pro-government representative told reporters that the opposition workers did not have proper (CNE) credentials.

----- Last-minute Rules Delay Opening of Some Centers -----

5. (U) The National Electoral Council (CNE) announced a prohibition on the use of computers at signature collection sites on November 27 (one day before the Reafirmazo started), thereby spiking the opposition's plan to use an electronic link to check signers' records in the electoral registry to ensure the data matched. Maracaibo centers checked registration information using an alternative plan whereby they shuttled information to check on computers in nearby apartments and homes. The CNE also ruled November 27 that the collection of signatures against National Assembly

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deputies had to be separated by 25 meters from the sites for the collection of signatures against the President. Emboffs observed that several signature centers created additional sites to comply with this new rule.

Reports of Disruptions

6. (U) There were late-morning press reports of scattered violence and disruption of signature centers in the west Caracas neighborhood of Carapita and in Anzoategui State. In both cases, several pro-Chavez toughs arrived to harass signers, resulting in chaotic shoving and shouting matches.

When Petroleum leader Juan Fernandez arrived at the collection site in Carapita, Chavez supporters nearby began throwing bottles and rocks at the people waiting to sign, according to media reports. The military personnel at the site, attempting to keep order, disrupted the live television feed by the private television channel Venevision.

Chavistas Deliver First Boxes of ProGoV Signatures

7. (U) On November 27, 2003, after a five-hour delay, the pro-government political activist group Comando Ayacucho, which organized the signature drive against opposition office-holders, delivered to the CNE six boxes of signatures to petition the recall of a National Assembly deputy from Margarita Island. They announced the boxes contain 3,315 pages with 10 signature lines per page. Comando Ayacucho chief and Podemos deputy Ismael Garcia emphasized that the delivery was "symbolic" and that the delivery of the more than four million signatures they claim to have collected November 21-24 would follow within the next 72 hours.

CNE Cautions Chavez Against Rhetoric

8. (U) In response to complaints about Chavez's November 26 "cadena" broadcast (carried by GoV mandate on all radio and TV media), in which Chavez called the opposition traitors, allegedly violating CNE media regulations, CNE director Jorge Rodriguez on November 27 publicly urged the President to refrain from such conduct. Rodriguez also announced the CNE would investigate the Minister of Labor's

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complaint that private businesses were pressuring people to sign against the President. The businessmen are allegedly demanding that employees show proof that they signed through a card that opposition groups will be providing to signers with information about where and on what form and line they signed. GoV officials from the President on down have demonstrated the card as proof of the opposition's propensity to commit fraud. The card, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was intended to be a receipt for the signers in case the signature was in any way tampered with during the process. [REDACTED]

Shapiro

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